

Mr. Thimblefinger and Mr. Rabbit.

New Stories of Mrs. Meadows and Her Queer Friends—The Butting Cow and the Hitting Stick.

By Joel Chandler Harris.

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"I hope that isn't the end of the story," remarked Buster John.

"Well," replied Mr. Rabbit, "we can either end it off here, or we can carry it on for weeks and weeks."

"Speak for yourself," said Mrs. Meadows, "or, if you want to, you can tell the rest of the story yourself. No doubt you can tell it a great deal better than I can."

"Now you'll have to excuse me," remarked Mr. Rabbit. "I thought maybe you were getting tired and wanted to rest. Go on with the tale. I'm getting old and trembly in the limbs, but I can stand it if the rest can."

"Well," said Mrs. Meadows, turning to Buster John and Sweetest Susan, "the children were very much worried over the loss of the coal-black sheep and the snow-white goat, and they made up their minds to try and get them back. The boy said he would go and ask Uncle Rain's advice, and the girl said she would visit Brother Drouth once more. So they started on their journey, one going east and the other going south."

"They met with no adventure, by the way, and, having traveled the road once, they were not long in coming to the end of their journey. The boy found Uncle Rain at home and told him all about the loss of his beautiful black sheep. Uncle Rain granted at the news, and looked very solemn."

"That's about the way I thought it would be," said he. "It takes a mighty strong-minded person to stand the loss of a sheep. But you needn't be afraid. Your sheep is not lost. The men who have stolen him can stand great pros-

the animal or seize him. So each party turned back.

"The merchants with the white goat reached the tavern first. But they had hardly refreshed themselves when the tavern keeper came running in and told them that the other merchants were coming."

"Then take our white goat and hide it in your stable," they say.

"The landlord did as he was bid, and then, meeting the merchants with the black sheep, he told them that their companions of the morning had also returned."

"Then take our black sheep and hide it in your stable," they said. This the landlord quickly did, and returned to the tavern in time to hear the merchants greet each other.

"What are you doing here?" asked the black sheep merchants.

"We have lost our white goat," they replied, "and have come here to hunt it. Why have you returned?"

"We have come on the same errand," said the others, "we have lost our black sheep, and have returned to find it."

"Now the tavern keeper was not a very smart man, but he had no lack of shrewdness and cunning. He had heard the merchants wrangling and quarreling over the black sheep and the white goat, and now he saw them coming back, pretending to be hunting for both the animals, though neither one was lost. He had sense enough to see that there must be something very valuable about the black sheep and the white goat, and so, while the merchants were taking their refreshments, each party eyeing the other with suspicion, the tavern keeper slipped out into his stable and carried the black sheep and the white goat to an outhouse out of sight and having the hotel, he was in a pickle. Neither party wanted to go away

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"WHERE'S OUR GOAT?"

perly no better than your father can. They will wrangle among themselves and they will never take the sheep away from the tavern. But they shall be punished. Come with me."

"Uncle Rain went out into his barnyard, and the boy followed him. He went to a stall where a black cow was tied. This," said he, "is the butting cow. You are to take her with you. She will allow no one to come near her but you, and when you give her the word she will run over and knock down whoever and whatever is in sight. She knows the black sheep, too, for they have long been in the barn together. When she begins to howl the black sheep will bleat, and in that way you may know when you have found it. More than that the cow will give you and the most beautiful golden butter that ever was seen."

"Uncle Rain untied the cow, placed the end of the rope in the boy's hand and bade him good by. The boy went back to the house, and the cow following closely and seeming to be eager to go with him."

"The girl who had taken the road to Brother Drouth's house arrived there safely and told her trouble. Brother Drouth said he was very sorry about it, but as it was not a thing to weep over he didn't propose to shed any tears."

"What's done," he said, "can't be undone; but I'll see that it's not done over again." He went to the corner of the room, picked up a walking-stick and gave it to the little girl. "We have here," he said, "a walking stick. It is called the hitting stick. Whenever you are in danger, or whenever you want to punish your enemies, you have only to say: 'Hit, stick! Hit, stick!' and neither one man nor a hundred can stand up against it. It is not too heavy for you to carry, but if your hands grow tired of carrying it, just say: 'Jump, stick!' and the stick will jump along before you, or by your side, just as you please."

"Then Brother Drouth bade the girl good by, and she went on her way, sometimes making it jump along the road before her."

"Now, then, while all this was going on the greedy merchants found themselves in a fix. When they first got hold of the coal-black sheep and the snow-white goat, they thought that they had had a good deal of trouble for nothing. But now, especially the merchants of those days, when there was not as much trade as there is now—had very sharp eyes, and it was not long before they found the springs under the horns of the sheep and the goat. Having found the treasure, they remembered that the man had spent more money in two days than the horns of the animals would hold, and this led them to discover that the horns were always full of treasure."

"For a little while they were very happy, and congratulated one another many times over. But in the midst of their enjoyment the thought came to them that there must be a division of this treasure. The moment the subject was broached the wrangle began, and the great question was how to divide the treasure so that each might have an equal share. Though they took millions from the horns of the black sheep and the white goat, yet whoever had the animals would still have the most."

"It was a mighty serious question. They argued, they reasoned, they disputed and they wrangled, and once or twice they came near having a pitched battle. But finally, after many days, it was decided that one party of merchants should have the black sheep and that another party should have the white goat. This didn't satisfy all of them, but it was the best that could be done, and so they separated, the party with the white goat going south, and the party with the black sheep going east."

"Now a very curious thing happened. If either party had kept on traveling it would have met the boy or the girl, one with the butting cow and the other with the hitting stick. But both parties were dissatisfied, and they had gone but a little way before they stopped, and after some talk, determined to go back. The merchants with the white goat determined to follow on after the merchants that had the black sheep and secure the animal by fair means or foul. The merchants with the black sheep determined to follow the merchants with the white goat and buy

and leave the other at the tavern, so they waited and waited—the black sheep party waiting for the white goat party to return, and the white goat party waiting for the black sheep party to go.

"As soon as we find our sheep. When do you leave?" says one.

"Quite as soon."

"There was no much satisfaction for either party in this for either side. Finally one of the merchants called the tavern keeper aside and asked him where he had put the black sheep."

"In my stable, your honor," replied the man.

"Then another merchant called the tavern keeper aside and asked him where he had put the white goat."

"In my stable, your honor," he replied.

"Now, each of these two parties went out to see that his precious animal was safe. It was perfectly natural that they should see each other slipping about in the yard and that they should meet face to face in the stable. Both made the excuse that they thought they might find their lost animals at that point and both were terribly worked up when they saw that the stable was empty. Each went back and told his companions, and pretty soon there was the biggest uproar in that house that the tavern keeper had ever heard."

"Both parties went running to the stable, falling over each other on the way, but the black sheep and the white goat were gone. Then the merchants went running back to the tavern and began yelling at the tavern keeper. Instead of making any answer that cunning chap put his fingers in his ears and politely asked the merchants if they wanted to jar the roof of the house. They danced around him, yelling and shaking their fists at him, but he kept his fingers in his ears."

"Finally they caught hold of the man and began to pull and haul him around at a great rate. In this way they compelled him to take his fingers out of his ears, but he could hear little better, for the whole crowd was

that I was a thief. I want to ask these men a few questions. By this time the two parties of merchants had ranged themselves on different sides of the room. The tavern keeper turned to one. "Didn't the men over there come over there and tell you that they had lost their white goat?"

"They certainly did," was the reply.

"Then he turned to the white goat party. "Didn't the men over there tell you that they had lost their black sheep and had come back to hunt it?"

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